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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

VOL. 9

FEBRUARY MCMXXXI

NUMBER 5

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

RECENT PLAYS

By S. R. Littlewood

AFTER Mr. Terence Gray's diatribe against the "professional critic" in last month's DRAMA, I approach the plays of the moment somewhat as Agag did Samuel's impending sword. The "professional critic" must, we read, by reason of his work, be blind to the future and oblivious of the present, and has not even been decently buried with the past. I can at least rejoice over having, in that event, no reputation to sustain. I can be frank, and confess that to me all this talk of art in terms of time seems futile. *Nil humanum alienum.*

I do not blame Mr. Gray, for instance, as a prophet-pioneer, for beginning the season at his Festival Theatre, Cambridge—to which his return is one of the auspicious events of the New Year—with a presentation of the ancient fable of *Aladdin*, including a male Widow Twankey, but repudiating the name of "pantomime," even in the Victorian, or Pickwickian, sense. These things teach us that the past—in the theatre, at any rate—is three-quarters of the present and probably a reckonable fraction of the future as well.

It is in its ideal blending of the three that I have welcomed the opening of the new Sadler's Wells. This beautiful and dignified playhouse seems to suggest, unmixed with baser matter, at once everything that is worth gathering out of the history of "the Wells" and everything that we hope for it in days to come. With the air of an old Georgian mansion about its red-brick front, there is yet none of the tawdy vulgarity which prevailed—as we know from his memoirs—in Grimaldi's day. It suggests homage to the greatness of Phelps, but not to the nondescript home he was constrained to labour in.

We are now to have Shakespeare without shabbiness. The stage, with its stairs on either side, is a useful compromise, though I do not think it settles the still unsolved problem of exits and entrances, which is so vital to Shakespearean production. Another yard of apron is, to my thinking, needed, so that the actors who thus arrive can join directly in a scene and not seem to be walking into a picture. Quite apart from everything else, this process leads to slowness.

Full of imagination and good taste though Mr. Harcourt Williams's setting of "*Twelfth Night*" was, I found myself disappointed both in Mr. John Gielgud's Malvolio and in Miss Dorothy Green's Viola. Mr. Gielgud did not give us Malvolio's strength. I always count Malvolio as one of those characters who—like Shylock and Touchstone—grow under Shakespeare's hand to a deeper life than their creator originally intended. I do not mean that he should not be comic; but in this comedy of "sad and merry madness"—part of the magic of which is that everyone is tuned a little sharp—it is clear he must stand forth, a masterful figure, a Laocoon of pilloried self-esteem, balancing the two groups of the love-mad and the laughter-mad, with Feste, the professional madman, compère to them all.

We cannot judge by a standard which no one remembers; but one gathers that Phelps's famous Malvolio did convey this ironic strength of character. Mr. John Gielgud, playing nearly always to weakness with his poses in profile, did not seem to me to get anything like the man's full force across the orchestra. I found, too, his prose diction monotonous. For all his good work and fine

RECENT PLAYS

temperament, as a comedian he has some things to learn.

On the other hand, Mr. Ralph Richardson's, Sir Toby; Mr. George Howe's, Sir Andrew; Miss Elsa Palmer's, Maria; Mr. Leslie French's, delightful Feste; Miss Joan Harben's pretty if rather overwhelmed Olivia; and Mr. Richard Riddle's, Fabian—recalling Mr. Ainley's manner as a good son should—afforded altogether hopeful proof that Miss Baylis has got together a team of young players out of whom a true "school" may grow. This should be helped by the fact that in future Sadler's Wells and the Old Vic combined will make a more or less permanent company possible—a company which will not be deserted each summer by its brightest ornaments and will be able to train and reward its own leading members. One begins to feel that between these and Stratford-upon-Avon the nucleus of a fellowship of players with a standard of Shakespearean acting worthy to be called "national" may be ultimately found.

Of course there are those who would have it that we are three hundred years too late and should cut our losses and get on with the "moderns." But what are three hundred years? Aristophanes' "Lysistrata," after two millennia, has been the success of the current season in New York. It figures permanently, I notice, in Mr. Terance Gray's Cambridge programme. In all essentials, Shakespeare is as modern as any dramatist we are sure of.

I have devoted this much space to Sadler's Wells, partly because its opening is of importance, not merely as restoring a classic theatre to a London suburb, but in all that it implies of a new point of view towards our English theatre as a matter for civic pride. Of the Christmas "shows" not much remains to be said. After all, to treat the holiday spirit seriously is a sin against the very grammar of life. A record number of twenty-five West End pantomimes and children's plays have come and some of them gone. The pantomimes—more than usually rivalled by review—have shown on the whole a reversion to the cheery reflex of popular festival and fancy represented by the Victorian and Edwardian product of which the little *Cinderella* at the Grafton was a definite reminder. No great attempt at further antiquarianism is to be recorded. Mr. Austin Strong's *The Toy-maker of Nuremberg*, adapted by Mr. Adrian Ross, with music by Mr. Douglas Glass will probably

be quite charming after two or three reappearances. A new treatment of "Alice in Wonderland" has not improved upon Savile Clarke's and Walter Slaughter's version, with all its faults. The early "postponement" of Mr. A. A. Milne's clever adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's "The Wind in the Willows" into "Toad of Toad Hall" to Mr. Fraser-Simson's music was not altogether surprising. One can give a play, as well as a dog, a bad name. By next Christmas whoever was responsible for that fatal title may have "larned" wisdom.

Then there are the Habbima players, with their Hebrew plays at the Phoenix. Whatever they may owe to Stanislavsky and others in vertical grouping, pied make-up, colour, rhythm, "stylism" and all the other words for the use of stage and company as a combined instrument, I find that the heart of their appeal was just thoroughness and heightened pitch of intensity at every point. One must forgive their *Twelfth Night* travesty, but moments in "The Dybbuk" and whole scenes of "The Crown of David" will live in my memory with a vividness unmatched by any recent effort in the direction of tragic power. Even here much suggests reminiscence of the old fiercely emotional "blue-chin" traditions which our well-dined theatre has lost, but which have survived elsewhere. Old David on his forlorn throne reminded me in a curious way of Irving's tremendous last act in "Louis XI." We have not had anything like it since; but these Jew actors, with their instinct for primitive passion, consciously decorated, have been able to bring it back to us—with the added effects of modern lighting and exotic design.

In useful contrast may be set Mr. David Horne's undoubtedly remarkable performance of the pretended and ultimately real madman of Andreyev's "The Betrayal" at the Little. I find the play full of new lights on a theme sufficiently familiar, from Shakespeare to Pirandello, and Mr. Horne's expense of nervous force a most commendable proof of his sincerity. But the effort and the exhaustion were alike too obvious—one sympathised with the actor instead of with the character.

The East London College Dramatic Society is giving the first performances of "Christopher Marlowe," a play in five acts, by Mr. Ernest Milton, on Thursday and Friday, February 19th and 20th, at 7.30 p.m., in the College Theatre.

A PLEA FOR THE SERIOUS THEATRE*

By Edward Gordon Craig

THE only thing I have studied all my life, and of which I am able to speak with some surety, is the theatre; and I will say at once, without apology, that the only theatre that interests me is the serious theatre. In that I am interested seriously.

It has been a grief to me for very many years that the serious theatre has not been honoured in England as it is in foreign lands.

The theatre of old times, first with its miracle and mystery plays, and then with its Elizabethan drama, was an exceptionally serious theatre. I rather wish that to-day the public would be kinder to our stage, and would allow us to be just as serious as they allow inventors to be, as they allow scientists and scholars in general to be. They call us "highbrow" when we who are artists wish to be serious. Why? They do not call inventors, scientists, or scholars "highbrow."

The last very serious work that was seen in the English Theatre was when Irving, for about thirty years, was master of the Lyceum, and with him my mother, Ellen Terry, and a troupe of serious workers. The Lyceum came to be called "the cathedral," and there were a few cheap jokes cracked about the solemnity of the master and the place, and the hush that belonged to that building, behind the scenes as well as in front. Who it was that started the fun (it seems to me very cheap fun), about this serious work, I cannot remember, but I believe it was started by some enthusiastic "disciple," and carried on by the jokers who seem to have had a contempt for cathedrals just because they were serious places.

If this seriousness had remained with us after Irving's death, we should at that time have established the theatre that I sketched out in my first book, just about that time. It was a quite new idea of what should be done, and it was quite serious. It was not the Irving Theatre, it was a new theatre. I felt that after Irving it would be best to turn over a new leaf, and not spoil his leaf by any attempted imitation. I thought that it would not be possible for any more great actors to come immediately after Irving, and also that the actor-manager

system was excusable only if there was a superlatively great actor. But the theatre men did not agree with me, and they continued the actor-manager system, hoping that in time they would attain to his stature. The Press agreed with and encouraged them. Twenty-five years have not produced one superlatively great actor in England, or on the Continent: but several companies of very good actors have been formed. A company of ten good actors, in which probably two of them have exceptional talent, forms quite as strong a combination as a single actor of exceptional genius with a group of assistants.

But besides this reversion to the old idea of a stock company of some fifteen good actors in place of one genius, I arrived at a new method of presenting plays. That new method can take many shapes, but it can only be produced by one process. This process is a very simple one, but, being very serious, the mere mention of it has always been met in England by the cry of "Highbrow!"

This is the process:

A group of actors, actresses, stage-managers and designers is brought together under a leader, who must be an artist. He must not be what is called an impresario—he must not be what we call "a practical business man," though a practical business man is pretty soon brought into the affair. This man must not dictate what cannot be done: he has simply to obey orders. He must have initiative and understanding. He must have devotion to the leader, and find ways and means of carrying out what is required—not make excuses for being unable to do as he is told. He must not say, "Your ideas are fantastic," because it is not his business to judge of ideas. The modern theatrical business man is rather feared by the artists in the theatre. One never knows what he may not do; he is so rash. The ordinary business man outside the theatre will also become a terror, if he should form the habit of acting as a certain bank-manager is alleged to have done on hearing of my projected association with good Mr. Cochran.

It is reported that Mr. Cochran was called to the telephone, and told, that if he did any-

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A PLEA FOR THE SERIOUS THEATRE

thing so silly as to act for me and my theatre, he should have no further overdraft. The "practical man" (the so-called "practical man") kills all art when he is in control: the artist creates. That is the great difference.

I will give you two good examples of first-class companies established by artists, in which the business man has been the devoted friend and servant of the idea and of the artist. These two examples are: the German Theatre of Max Reinhardt, who had as his business assistant his brother, Edmund Reinhardt; and the Theatre of Constantin Stanislavsky, the Russian, who had as his business assistant a certain Nemirovitch-Dantchenko. These two business assistants did not "bluff," they did their work like capable heads of departments. I have seen Reinhardt's Theatre at work, and I have seen Stanislavsky's Theatre at work—not when they visited these shores, but in their native towns. Reinhardt is head of his Theatre, and Stanislavsky is head of the Russian Theatre. Each is surrounded by a large staff of expert producers, designers, ballet-masters, writers, historians of the drama and engineers. I do not know how many people Reinhardt's general staff consists of, but I suppose twenty to thirty. There are more with Stanislavsky, for he has three studios besides his theatre, and there is a small staff in each of these studios. In all, I suppose, he has over a hundred people on his general staff, probably a hundred and fifty.

You will hardly believe it when I tell you that I have spoken once or twice of this matter to men in England who were supposed to be serious theatre business people, and they have replied that it was quite unnecessary to have such a staff, quite unnecessary to have such a business man, quite unnecessary to have anything which these two well-established and highly successful centres in Europe have had and still have. When I say "successful" I mean artistically successful and financially successful, too. And the result is that instead of our land possessing such an organisation as that of the Germans or that in Russia we are obliged to be content only to hear of these two foreign organisations, which have placed those two foreign theatres in the very foremost position in the world theatre.

And now I come to my point. Unless such an organisation is created here in England, all the immense talent that is possessed by the many serious actors of England, and by the serious producers, designers and other craftsmen in the theatre, will be lost.

I have spoken to many members of the profession since I have been here during the last three months, and I have found in all of them a regret that there is no one central experimental theatre, like the two foreign ones I have mentioned, a theatre in which they can feel at home—which, in fact, they can call their home; for at present, actors are shifted from one theatre to another with an alarming rapidity, which makes them restless and renders them unable to do justice to their great talents. We are homeless—we are always having to take "furnished apartments." It is an insufferable situation which no other profession would submit to. Suppose we told the editors of journals that every six months they were to shift their quarters, their workshops—what could they do in such circumstances? They would refuse to work—they would say that it was ridiculous—yet nobody realises that it is ridiculous to ask any band of players to move from theatre to theatre. They are uprooted time after time—nothing can stand that strain, and live.

I feel certain that if you who read this could realise how much you are losing, and England is losing, you would kick up a little shindy and put it right for us. And I wish you would enquire whether bank managers are really making a *habit* of hindering the establishment of theatres which aim at doing honour to England.

Why it should be customary in England to attack good work and hamper serious good artists, I do not know, but it is always being done. I cannot go into the matter here: strange that the hysterical part of the English temperament can be worked on by a small group of self-opinionated nobodies, who tell us the tarradiddles that "Shakespeare spells ruin," that our Bible is too highbrow to read—and that good work is bad and bad work is good—and so forth. Take an example of modern work—the sculpture of our foremost sculptor, Epstein. You will remember his statues for the British Medical Association building in the Strand. When they were unveiled, a scream went up: you remember that? You recall the Hudson Memorial in Hyde Park, and the silly row about *that*; people were worked up to throw pots of ink at the work. That babyish bad temper is almost unknown on the Continent, or in any other land. We may like or dislike a new piece of sculpture, a new picture, or a new production; but we are not called on to be active about these things. Has not an unruly



LAST ACT OF "THE ADVENTURER," AS
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THE GHOST APPEARS TO EDMUND O'GORDON'S DAUGHTER. A SCENE FROM "TOWIE CASTLE" BY GORDON BOTTOMLEY. AS PRODUCED AT THE RUDOLPH STEINER HALL.



A PLEA FOR THE SERIOUS THEATRE

Irishman told us that before a work of art we must be passive?

What we want to see in England is a firmer welcome given to the original work of men of talent in all branches of art. My special plea is that you extend to the men of talent in the theatre a more steadfast welcome, and that you encourage them to do their best work, not urge them to take to plays like "Almost an Affaire," "Her First Honeymoon," "On the Boat," "The Show Spot," and so on.

In the last few years there has been a torrent of cheap stuff poured out instead of good plays, and *reasons* are always being given why cheap stuff should be acted in a cheap way. The chief reason is insulting to you—they say you are a fool and that you prefer bad eggs to good ones. You are one of several millions, and you are allowed no choice in the matter—you

have these plays given you whether you want them or no because several thousands of your fellows are a bit dull: and because they like these plays, and go to them, you are driven away from the theatre.

But I hope that what I have said may end in my being able to prepare for you a really serious, good and permanent theatre—a theatre where courtesy to all the arts is evident, and from which thought is not entirely absent—a theatre not for one small group alone, but for the whole public that cares about serious things. And I am convinced that our English people do care about the *most* serious things, I mean, serious work done in a grown-up manner. The work as it is done to-day is all baby-work—the talk all baby-talk—and the whole grandeur and beauty which illumines this big, if brief, life of ours is turned merely to favour and to prettiness.

DRAMA AND TRADITION

By Maxwell Armfield

THE interest in the stage all over Great Britain, is sufficiently intense to have aroused quite a controversy in DRAMA; a controversy refreshing enough and not unlike that existing in the "Dark Ages" (now dazzling compared with our own) amongst the Troubadours . . . the exponents of the Trobar-clus, at daggers drawn with those of the Trobar-clar.

It is easy now to see that they were both right: that art to be vital must contain a Kernel of the inexpressible Infinite; yet it must also find contact with finite pre-occupations.

Yet the so-called modern movement in act is *au fond* and actually a new phase, uncovered by historic parallel, for it has arisen as we know from two cognate causes, both of which must be considered more than they have as yet been, to arrive at a basis of unity. I refer to the rise of a self-conscious and potentially art-loving democracy demanding intelligent leisure; and a universal acquaintance with the art product of all periods and places.

This state of things is unique in world experience and produces results that cannot be seen, but must certainly include and insist on a technique at once complex and easily acces-

sible, and a universal opportunity for its exercise. This in its turn implies a study of art (Drama) that is much more in the nature of mathematical or scientific practice than anything else. (It has always seemed to me a supremely foolish argument against the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's plays that he had a scientific attitude, for all the greatest artists are so characterised.)

We are at the moment trying to assimilate the points of view in the Theatre of ancient Greece, Italy and China, as well as Japan, India, Thibet and a dozen other sources, and at the same time to develop on Folk-art foundations or on the immediate past of the commercial stage.

One clutches at a fragment here, another secures an "idea" there, diametrically opposed. Yet they may both be necessary.

The idea that a National Theatre would or could classify all this heterogeneous material, give it to us in wise doses and digest it for us into a workable Tradition is as wildly fantastic as that of any "progressive," or "insurgent." Yet it is quite evident that such a clearing-house would be invaluable. Why then do the most ardent spirits demur?

Why will the left Wing have none of it?

DRAMA AND TRADITION

Chiefly perhaps because the above aim has never been promulgated in this connection.

Tradition is a strange thing and we understand it little.

Youth, zealous without experience, derides—not Tradition, but the husk his father has made of it—and longs to remake the world without it. He begins to build on his own model and then, no longer so young, he sees the advantage a protection against more upstart notions, and creeps into his house which finally becomes a tomb. As usual, the vicious finite circle, instead of the infinitely expanding spiral—which Tradition actually is. The true Tradition can no more be discarded than it can be sealed, for in its nature it exists and recurs like the Spring.

Canute was an incorrigible example of inexperienced youth, and not a reactionary; whilst Constantine cloaked his wily dislike of change in a rather transparently insincere show of progress. So to-day, nothing would seem more necessary than the widest possible experiment in order to evolve a mould into which our formless desires can be poured, and at the same time, without a clear and expert knowledge of mould-making, the process will be interminably long and very tedious to the more prescient. To correlate these two complementary necessities would seem to be the function of any organised movement of the character of the Drama League.

Mr. Terence Gray quite rightly demands a "progressive" attitude, whilst the Editor of *DRAMA* rather pertinently asks, "What is Progress." Yet these points of view are, as I have tried to show, potentially one. We must become world-conscious in art, and at the same time we must be willing to relinquish our antiquated artistic snobbery and realise that our technique is of no more real interest than a forge or a lathe and ought to be as easily controlled.

One sees in the United States, where the unorthodox Theatre is more rampant than it is here, that a so-called progressive policy may be just as sterile as a musical Comedy complex. A re-hash of the superficial tricks of Craig, Appia, Meierhold & Co. is at least as exasperating as a West End success and leads us no farther. The capacity to originate or even use intelligently, new tools is so extremely rare that nothing more formal than lessons in technique or the opportunity of production should be demanded for experiment: and there is really little chance for a long continued tyranny of Reaction.

The parochial stupidity of the "village producer" type of work suffers from exactly the same trouble as the majority of progressive experiments, *i.e.* a narrowness of experience and outlook.

Mr. Whitworth in his (I had almost said "historic") question implies "it is easy to talk"; I have therefore indicated below a few of what I myself consider the basic elements of the new (and how old?) point of view, and perhaps at some future time we might be allowed in *DRAMA* similar articles of faith from other producers! This method being simpler than that of discussions at gatherings which so few can attend.

It is proposed:—

(a) That Drama includes all art and unifies all crafts. This implies that a mimed dance or a *chanson-de-geste* is as much a form of Drama as an "opera" or a five-act play.

(b) That Drama is not legitimately either an amusement or a form of emotional release, but the Statement, Presentation or Representation of dramatic Ideas, either of tragedy (the ancient definition of ideas proceeding from the Centre outwards) or Comedy (from the Circumference of life, inwards): and that this is actually more entertaining.

(c) That the Proscenium, Footlights, Flies, Masks, and other details of the stage are tools that are useful or not according to the aim of the Director. (It is as silly to say that a Proscenium is old-fashioned, as to say that a chisel is.)

(d) That, as Gordon Craig said thirty years ago and has been amply proved since; the most interesting production is that in which Author, Producer, and Director are one.

(e) That the silly and meaningless labels of "amateur" and "professional" be abolished in this country as they are elsewhere.

The question of finance is an important one, but it has nothing to do with the artistic status of the company nor of the artists connected with it. It is the aim of democracy to raise every one far above the level of the aristocrat: the same applies to the Drama.

(f) And finally, that the only decisions likely to be of much importance in Dramatic Festivals will be made by judges selected by the participants or by open vote of the audience.

A POSTAL COURSE IN DRAMA

ANNOUNCING A NEW ACTIVITY OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO
MEMBERS OF THE DRAMA LEAGUE, AND OTHERS

IT is true that the dramatist is born, not made; but the love of telling stories and of acting them is widespread among children and early peoples. So that it would seem as if the dramatic instinct were a part of our human make-up. This native tendency blossoms in the genius, who appears however not "out of the blue" but as the apex of a pyramid of less gifted and perhaps unknown workers. Many inferior sculptors prepared the way for Michaelangelo, and many inferior playwrights prepared the way for Shakespeare.

The love of story-telling and story-writing should therefore be encouraged, even when the gift does not rise above the level of talent, and comes far short of genius. Amateur dramatic writing may be of small intrinsic worth or importance, but it may help to build the pyramid.

The ability to invent a drama, or to see drama in a set of circumstances or of people, is an original gift. It is there, or it is not there. No learning of the rules of prosody will make a poet, and no learning of the rules of dramatic technique will make a dramatist. If the gift is strong enough, it will defy all existing rules; or, if there are none, will create them for itself, as in the case of Greek Drama. But, short of genius, rules are useful; and the difference between a daub and a picture is that the painter of the latter knows at least the elements of the general technique of his art.

In the course of a year, the British Drama League examines a large number of plays written by would-be amateur playwrights. By far the larger proportion of these plays reveal the existence of the gift in some measure; but of these many fail as good plays and incidentally as commercial propositions, because the writers of them lack knowledge of even the elements of the necessary technique.

Amateurs write plays usually to please themselves, which is the soundest possible reason; sometimes no doubt for private performance among friends or local groups of amateur actors; and sometimes with a view to wider fame and larger profit. This last, of course, neither the British Drama League nor anybody else can assure. But since the pleasure of writing a good play is

greater to the author than that of writing a bad one; and because an increased sense of ability usually goes with an increased technical command; the British Drama League proposes to establish a Correspondence School for instruction in the elements of the technique of play-writing.

The British Drama League will be responsible for the Course of Instruction, and will appoint a competent Director of Studies whose services will be at the disposal of students. It may be taken for granted that the person so appointed will be capable of guiding students through the Course, and will have the confidence of the British Drama League; but the League will not accept responsibility for any comments or criticisms which the Director of Studies may make upon the work of students.

The Course will consist of Twelve Lessons which will deal in detail with such fundamental matters as the Construction of a Play, Character-drawing, Dialogue, and will cover the whole ground generally. The aim of the Course will be to provide the student with a working knowledge of general technique which will be valuable to him in writing any kind of play. The probability will be borne in mind that the majority of students will be interested chiefly in the modern type of play. The fullest attention will however be given to the personal bent of the individual student; and special encouragement will be offered to those who, in solving the various problems offered in the course, wish to make experiments in form. To each Lesson will be appended a set of Questions and Exercises; and the answers to these will be examined, criticised, and corrected, by the Director of Studies personally. The Lessons will be sent by post. No limit will be set to the time which a student may take over each Lesson; and each succeeding Lesson will be sent when the answers and exercises of the preceding one have been received.

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A POSTAL COURSE IN DRAMA

Students must be members of the British Drama League. The subscription to the League is One Guinea per annum, which entitles the student, among other things, to the use of the Library in which he (or she) may read, or from which borrow plays and works dealing with all aspects of the dramatic craft. The Library is a natural, and extremely valuable, adjunct to the Course of Instruction.

The charge for the Course of Twelve Lessons will be Seven Guineas, which should be paid before the first lesson is received; but the British Drama League will be willing to meet the convenience of students who may prefer to pay the fee in instalments. A minimum of Two Guineas however must be paid before the Course is commenced, and the full payment before it is completed. An extra lesson, for any student who may wish it,

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At the conclusion of the Course, an opportunity will be given to each student to write an original play, upon which the Director of Studies will return a detailed written criticism.

While the British Drama League cannot in any way offer or guarantee to recommend or place the plays of students with publishers or theatrical managers, it would be naturally pleased to exert what influence it may have on behalf of any work of outstanding merit achieved by any student taking the Course.

All inquiries should be addressed to the British Drama League, 8, Adelphi Terrace, London, W.C.2, from whom copies of the Prospectus, and students' entrance forms, may be obtained.

WRITING A ONE-ACT PLAY

II. THE DIALOGUE.

By Edward Lewis

IN a one-act play the number of characters is usually small; but the number is frequently larger than it ought to be. Economy is the watchword; and the rule is: Never have two characters where one will do. The leading characters must of course be there; it is among the minor characters that a reduction may be effected. The minor characters will have some work to do in the play; communicating, for example, some piece of information to the audience, or providing a link in the action. The question is whether the work done by one of them could be equally well done by another; in which case one could be scrapped. It is a good plan to write out a scenario, or skeleton, of your play; or at least a list of your characters, with the work to be performed by each; and study carefully whether a reduction in number may be made. The reason for this economy is obvious; it makes for clearness, and promises a sharper impression upon the audience.

Balance your leading characters in weight well over against each other; and see that the minor ones keep strictly to their job. I read recently the manuscript of a play in which there was a charwoman—a minor character, but essential to the action. She was a voluble

and amusing old lady, as such often are. The author was evidently very fond of her; so fond, that when once he had her on the stage he found it difficult to get her off. The result was that she dominated the play too much, and ruined its balance. The play might have been a good one, if she hadn't been so good.

Choose interesting characters. The time factor enters here. In a full-length play, a character has time to lay siege to the interest of an audience; in a one-act play, it must be taken by storm. The audience will not care what happens to a character in which it is not interested; he may be murdered or married in the end, but it will make no difference; he will seem to them dull, and either fate will be too good for him. A character may interest you, as the author very much, but the test of your ability to write a successful play is whether you can make him equally interesting to the audience. Many plays fail on this account. Catch the sympathetic imagination of the audience by the first entrance, the first utterance of the character, if you can.

An important point crops up here. Unskilled writers fail to make full use of entrances and exits. These are always critical and

WRITING A ONE-ACT PLAY

exciting moments in a play. Tension is high. The audience is ready to receive a lively and deep impression. No writer of a one-act play, in which every moment is valuable, should be satisfied until he has got the fullest possible value out of exits and entrances. They are not simply ways of getting people on or off the stage, into or out of each others' way. They should characterise; they should add to the sum of the character and of the action. It is not simply a question of how the actor walks on, or off; that is the producer's business; but of writing the dialogue and arranging the emotional sequence so that these are prepared for, come on the stroke of time, with the maximum effect.

In most plays, other than sheer melodrama or farce, character is almost everything. Character is situation; character is plot; so Mr. Galsworthy has said, and he means that even in a play which turns upon some critical situation it is better that the situation should be shown as arising out of the characters involved, rather than that the situation should be first conceived and the characters then fitted into it. This cannot always be done. Often it is the situation which first occurs to the author, and is the genesis of his play. In which case he must either so choose, or mould, his characters that they appear to create it; or at least fit naturally into it.

How shall you get your character "over" to the audience? Well, in the first place, you must be perfectly clear about him yourself. You must know him through and through. You must know his type, and must also have an absolutely definite impression of his individuality in your own mind. You cannot study your characters too carefully, or live with them too intimately.

In a one-act play you are almost entirely dependent for your character-drawing upon what the character actually says and does upon the stage. You have no time to report his history, and very little time to allow the other characters to talk about him, or for any of the other dodges which are available for the writer of a long play. You can reveal him only by his speech and action. Therefore the words you put into his mouth, and the situations in which you cause him to move, must be strictly chosen with a view to this revealing. He must be characterising himself all the time.

The secret here is to "get inside his skin." If you stand outside your character, you may dress him up properly like a lay figure; you

may move him correctly like a piece on a chess-board; you may even, with luck, make him speak "in character"; but the chances are heavy against you. But if you are in his skin, living the part with him and in him, you will perceive exactly the kind of situation he would create, you will feel what is the right bearing for him, and the right characterising words will come.

You will also by this same means avoid another common snag—Inconsistency. A character should be "in character" all the time, revealing himself more and more fully by his words, his actions, his exits and entrances; and he must be consistently himself, and credible to the audience, all through. This is a difficult task for the playwright, but much easier if he is himself living inside the part.

Besides; one of the commonest criticisms passed upon both a written and an acted play is that it does not come to life. It is a fatal criticism. Sometimes not all the skill of the actors can make a play come to life; they remain as dead men walking. But the chances of a play coming to life, whether in the imagination of the reader or in the experience of the audience, are immeasurably increased if the author was alive in his play, if he was inside the skin of his characters, if he felt the sweep and rhythm of the play as a living movement within himself.

BEDFORD COLLEGE

An exceptionally interesting production is to be given by Bedford College (University of London) Dramatic Society on Friday and Saturday evenings, February 13th and 14th, in the College Theatre, Regent Park.

The play is Goldoni's "The Impresario from Smyrna" and this will be its first performance in England. The translation is by Mr. Clifford Bax. (Four Comedies by Carlo Goldoni, edited by Clifford Bax. Cecil Palmer. 25s.)

It is curious that this play should have been overlooked for so long as it is immensely amusing and is a delightful satire on Italian theatrical artists. The producer is Mr. Robert Young. Both performances are open to the public and begin at 8.15 p.m.

NATIONAL FESTIVAL FINAL

This is now fixed for the afternoon of Monday, April 20th. Full particulars will be duly announced, but in the meanwhile, the date should be booked. The Festival will take place in London.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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Telephone: TEMPLE BAR 8507-8.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE Council of the League has carefully considered the question raised at the Exeter Conference in regard to the desirability of increasing the League's revenue, and as a result it suggests that the more established affiliated Societies might consider supporting the League financially to a somewhat greater extent than the minimum subscription demanded by the rules. The Council points out that already the League is honoured by a certain number of "Patron members" who each subscribe five guineas per annum, instead of the ordinary membership fee of one guinea. The Council would be very glad to add to this list of Patron members the names of any affiliated Societies who would be willing individually to contribute a similar amount, and a full list would be published

from time to time. Alternatively, if a Society feels able to subscribe any larger sum than one guinea, its generosity would be much appreciated, and duly noted by the League.

The Committee of the Clubroom at 8, Adelphi Terrace have decided that membership to the Club shall be thrown open to any applicant at the annual subscription of 10s. 6d., provided that, if not already a member of the League, his, or her, candidature be proposed and seconded by a member of the League. The membership of the Club at present amounts to approximately 350. The Club can accommodate at least 400 members, and it is much hoped that this number may be obtained. We would remind country readers that the Club affords a convenient meeting or resting place during the day, and that it is open for light meals until 8 o'clock. Discussions are held on Tuesday afternoons once every month during the Winter. The next discussion is to be opened on Tuesday, February 10, by Mr. R. C. Sherriff.

No apology is needed for the reprinting from "The Listener" of the important article by Mr. Gordon Craig which appears on another page of this issue. Mr. Craig adumbrates the establishment of a theatre which is manifestly a crying need of the present time. Enthusiasts for a National Theatre will find in this article a potent source of inspiration, though it is only fair to say that we believe that Mr. Craig, in writing as he does, does not actually envisage a theatre endowed by the State. Some readers may think that the very idea of such a theatre is visionary. But Mr. Craig has every right to see visions, because he is himself a practical artist of the theatre. Too many people forget that Mr. Craig has been actually responsible for no fewer than thirteen major stage productions, of which seven were given in England in the years immediately preceding the war.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"Writing the Stage Play." By Horace Wingfield. Blue Gate Press, 2s.

"The Key" and "With All John's Love." By Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. Benn, 3s. 6d. each.

"Five Greenleaf Theatre Plays." By Constance Smedley. French, 1s. each.

"Junior One-Act Plays of To-day." Edited by A. E. M. Bayliss. Harrap, 2s. 6d.

As a reviewer I have had to read most of the many handbooks on how to write a play published during the last few years, but I do not remember a single one which sufficiently stressed the fact that the playwright is not the creator of a completed work of art, but is dependent on the collaboration of actors and producers to bring his work to life. Mr. Horace Wingfield is yet one more writer on the subject of play writing who almost ignores this point, and the two plays by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes are typical examples of what happens when the point is ignored by the playwright.

Mrs. Belloc Lowndes has the fault common among novelists turned playwrights; she distrusts the capabilities of actors and takes too much upon her own shoulders. The most obvious symptom of this distrust is the way her two plays are peppered with exasperatingly unnecessary instructions to the actor as to when he must move, when he must make a pause, how he must deliver important lines, what expression must show upon his face. These instructions show a singularly low opinion of the intelligence of actors and producers, and one would be inclined to presume that they were merely inserted for the sake of the ordinary non-theatrical readers of plays were it not for the fact that the whole style of the dialogue betrays the same distrust of the actor. Whole pages are devoted to driving home a point which a more theatrically minded playwright would express in a two or three sentences of dialogue, trusting to the actor to use his technique to make the point perfectly clear to the audience. In other words, spurning the collaboration of actor and producer, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes is driven to elaborate all her points with the painstaking care of the novelist, who knows that unaided he must make himself clear to the reader. But the genuine playwright knows that in the theatre an inflexion of the voice, a gesture, a lift of the eyebrow, can often do the work of a whole page of words. As a result of her method, Mrs. Lowndes has had no space with which to deal with the subtleties of her themes, and has merely written a couple of obvious and melodramatic stories. But being an excellent story-teller, both her plays make capital reading if regarded simply as narratives.

Miss Constance Smedley's plays are a complete contrast. They are splendidly unreadable. By this I mean that in print they are as incomplete as the score of a symphony. They are written to be *acted*, not just recited with the minimum of gesture and facial expression. "Belle and Beau," for instance, is essentially a dance play, a play to be danced not to music but to words, the words forming a tune for every movement, the metre changing with the emotions of the speakers, and sometimes forming the musical motif for a character. In a producer's note to "The Gilded Wreath," described as "a modern caricature," the author points out that Dalcroze has shown the variations of walks in different tempos, and that in this play his method is to

be applied to words instead of music, the play to be "worked out absolutely in time to the words, with passages of dancing steps." "Pierrot's Welcome," illustrated with sixty marginal diagrams for the actor, is a study in significant movement fascinating to the actor or the producer; in fact, all these five plays are an inspiration to anybody who believes in the expressive power of stylised gesture and movement in the theatre.

To return to Mr. Wingfield's book, it might be more accurately entitled "How to write a Box-Office Success." The author industriously tabulates all the ingredients which in his opinion make a popular play, but in doing so he merely re-states all the fallacies of those managers who with increasingly disastrous results put on what they firmly believe "the public wants." Box-office returns during recent years have proved emphatically that the best way to write a box-office success is simply to write a good play. Theories about "what the public wants" are invariably based on what the public wanted yesterday, but the playwright has to give the public what it will want tomorrow. As this is something even the cleverest manager cannot forecast, the playwright's safest policy is not to underrate the intelligence of the public and give it the best play he is capable of writing. I cannot think of a single really first-class play really well produced and acted and properly advertised which has failed in London during recent years. Two of the biggest box-office successes of recent months "Street Scene" and "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" break all Mr. Wingfield's rules for success, and prove once again that the intelligent public is much larger and more profitable than the ordinary managers have yet realised.

On other points Mr. Wingfield is usually sound enough, but like most writers on the subject he says nothing which is not simply ordinary commonsense. If a playwright has not enough ordinary gumption to follow these rules instinctively, without the aid of a handbook, he is hardly likely to have the sense of the theatre necessary to write a good play. However, Mr. Wingfield's book is a concise and workmanlike piece of writing which can be thoroughly recommended to the ordinary reader who has no particular desire to write a play, but is curious to know the principles of dramatic composition.

A book which was badly needed is the anthology of one-actors which Mr. Bayliss has made for players between the ages of twelve and sixteen. The editor has chosen the plays on the principle that "there must be action of the more robust and even boisterous type, the dialogue must be simple rather than sophisticated, the humour direct rather than subtle." Too many anthologies of this sort contain plays chosen mainly for their supposed "literary value" instead of their dramatic effectiveness, but the eleven plays in this book are all both good theatre and good entertainment, and not one of them commits the unforgivable fault of condescending to the supposed level of the child. In fact, only two or three of the plays were originally written for children, and all of them are worth the attention of any ordinary amateur society. As Mr. Bayliss has successfully avoided the hackneyed in his choice of plays, his anthology has a much wider appeal than the title suggests.

A QUICK CHANGE SET

By E. F. Watling

THE following notes of an actual production by a school dramatic society are offered as an example of a method of achieving an apparently elaborate result with very simple means, within the reach of any school or community society.

The play is Bickerstaffe's comic opera, "Lionel and Clarissa," period 1768, in the version published as the Lyric Theatre version. The text provides for three Acts, with three scenes in each, running as follows: Act I, Sc. 1, *Breakfast-room at Colonel Oldboy's house.* Sc. 2, *Library at Sir John Flowerdale's house.* Sc. 3, *Approach to Sir J. F.'s house.* Act II, Sc. 1, *Hall in Sir J. F.'s house.* Sc. 2, *Dressing-room in same.* Sc. 3, *Garden by moonlight.* Act III, Sc. 1 — I, 1. Sc. 2 — II, 2. Sc. 3 — II, 1.

On consideration of the play as a whole, two points force themselves upon the producer's notice: (1) that whatever economies may be made in the setting, the audience must be given every chance of grasping clearly the movement of the play between the two houses in which the action takes place. (No setting is a good one which depends on the programme for its interpretation.); (2) that these 9 scenes cannot be adequately set without unduly long intervals, unless some use be made of "front and back stage" scenes separated by "tab" curtains. Our object, in fact, is to have no intervals between scenes in an Act, and to confine the heaviest changes to the Act intervals.

Turning to the text of the play, we find that there is no whole scene which can satisfactorily be played in front of tabs, with the possible exception of I, 3, which is so short as to be hardly worth a full setting, and which is so written as to be easily playable on a shallow two-dimensional stage. Probably therefore we shall not be sorry to dispense with one exterior setting altogether, and save our resources in that line for a later scene. But, if we cannot set any scene but this entirely on the fore-stage, we do find that nearly every scene ends with a soliloquy or a song, and usually both, and this convenient fact solves the question of scene-intervals, for we shall have our tabs closed towards the end of each scene, leaving an actor or two in front, and while the scene finishes the main stage will be set for the next scene.

On this system, then, we are committed to the following requirements: a fore-stage with entrances on each side, tableau curtains, and a main stage, on which a number of changes will have to be carried out *swiftly and silently* while sub-scenes are being played in front. This means, for the average inconvenient hall and inexperienced scene-shifters, *no* moving of flats during the Act and the *minimum* of furniture. Fortunately this is just what suits the style and period of the play and with reference to the accompanying sketches we shall now see the settings in working order.

The main curtain (not shown) opens to disclose the inner proscenium and tabs (Fig. 1). The side doors, which are permanent throughout the play, are designed to resemble the permanent proscenium doors of the eighteenth century theatre, and together with the hanging candelabra (3-ply wood and dummy candles), which are also permanent, serve to give a characteristic style to the setting.

Act I, Sc. 1 (Fig. 2) consists of a window flat between the black curtains which form the general background of the scenes; table, three chairs.

Sc. 1a. Close tabs and continue scene (about 3 minutes).

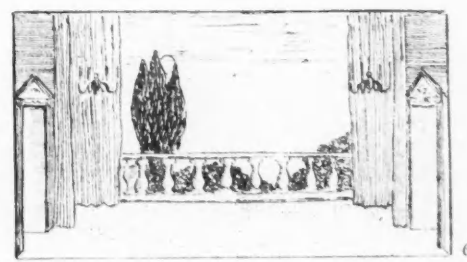
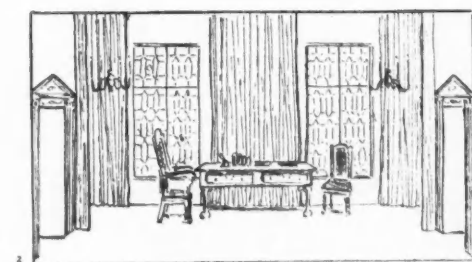
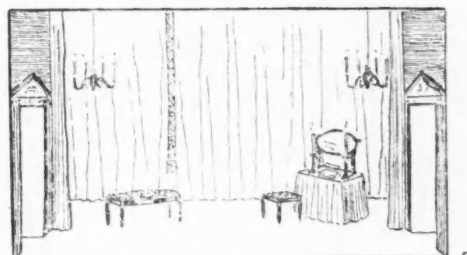
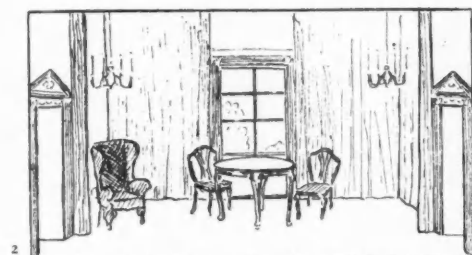
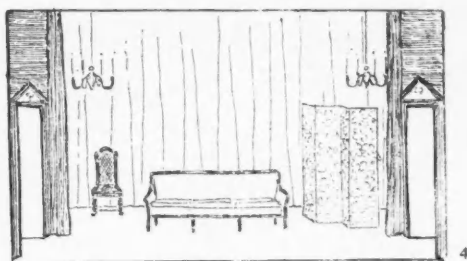
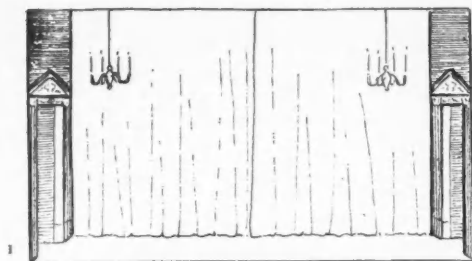
Sc. 2 (Fig. 3). Black curtains have been rearranged to disclose two other flats (painted windows). These were in position at the beginning of the play, and the flat of Sc. 1 is now covered but *not* moved. Furniture is changed (essential because a different house), and incidentally the whole character and proportions of the scene have been altered.

Sc. 3. Played in front of tabs.

Act II, Sc. 1 (Fig. 4). During the interval the flats have been removed and the black curtains form the whole background for the next two scenes, with change of furniture. In this scene the action is almost entirely concentrated on the sofa, as its prominent position indicates.

Sc. 1a. Close tabs, and continue with short soliloquy and a few bars of music repeating the previous song.

Sc. 2 (Fig. 5). Dressing-table, two seats, bell-rope, have been put on. (By the way, the dressing-table was ready behind the screen in the previous scene.)



SIX SETS FOR "LIONEL AND CLARISSA,"
AS PRODUCED BY A SCHOOL DRAMATIC
SOCIETY.

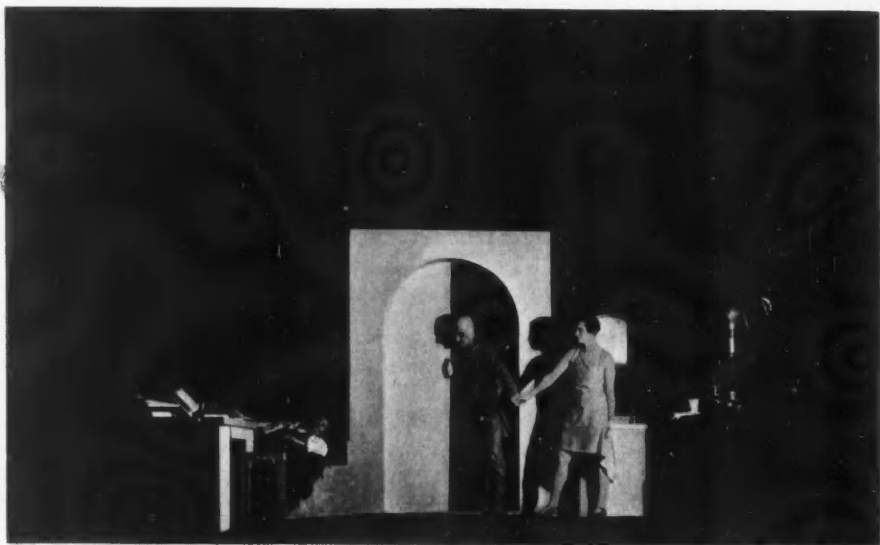


Photo by Gerald Manley.

STAGE SETTING BY SYDNEY THOMPSON
FOR THE FINAL ACT OF "R.U.R.," AS
PRODUCED FOR THE HULL PLAYGOERS'
SOCIETY, BY MRS. JAMES DOWNS.

A QUICK CHANGE SET

Both these scenes, 1 and 2, are warmly lighted for evening effect, giving good value to the hanging candles and also to the candles (lit) on dressing-table.

Sc. 2a. Close tabs and continue with scene and songs for two characters.

Sc. 3 (Fig. 6). All furniture off. Black curtains parted, to form a frame for garden set and sky-cloth, all of which have been in position throughout the play, behind the line of flats and curtain. Blue light on sky and inner stage, moon effect behind trees, front stage dark. Note that the front stage is scarcely noticed in this scene, but even if it were, the effect is in harmony with the period style, when as a matter of fact the candles would be the actual source of illumination.

Act III, Sc. 1. During interval, the flats are replaced as at beginning of play, also furniture as for I, 1.

Sc. 1a. Short scene in front of tabs.

Sc. 2 — I, 2. Dressing-room (by daylight).

Sc. 3. There is no front-stage scene here, but a few bars of music are enough to tide over a quick change to

Sc. 3. Flats as for I, 2, but no furniture except one chair, as this scene is fully occupied by the whole cast for finale.

In the actual working, there were *no* intervals between scenes, 5 minutes between Acts I and II, and 15 minutes between Acts II and III. The following points may be noted as applying to all productions of this nature: (1) No furniture is put on the stage which is not actually necessary for the action of a scene. (2) Such changes as are necessary are designed to give completest possible alteration in the *atmosphere* of the scene; in this way the audience is led to imagine that much more scene-shifting has been done than is actually the case. (3) *Swiftness* and *silence* are paramount: hence elimination of "flat-shifting" and concentration on furniture and curtains. At the same time the monotony of complete curtain setting has been avoided. (4) The furniture *must* be good and appropriate.

CRITICISM BY CATALOGUE

THE duty of a critic is to criticise, and the duty of a dramatic critic is undoubtedly to criticise the drama. But the present-day critic seems to tend more and more to make his criticism merely a series of comparisons.

It is granted that in order to criticise a play certain standards must be agreed upon and regarded as the yardstick for measuring dramatic achievement, but comparison surely should not go further than this.

Yet nowadays if any play resemble in theme any play of the past (and we know the number of possible combinations of plot to be strictly limited), it is not criticised as an entertainment standing by itself but, on the contrary, its absolute success or failure as an entertainment is subordinated to the consideration of whether it is better or worse than any of its fore-runners in style and character. Still more is this the case where an old play has been revived. Then each actor is compared, usually to his detriment, with every actor who has played the part in former productions; and it is submitted that this conception of criticism is absolutely wrong.

Richard Burbage, Charles Kean and Henry

Ainley probably gave very different renderings of the part of Hamlet, yet if Hamlet be produced to-day the criticisms of the performance will not be as to whether the tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, by William Shakespeare, is well-written, well-acted, good entertainment, but whether Mr. John Smith who plays the Prince compares favourably or not with Macready or Irving or any of the hundreds of Hamlets in the past.

It is not for one moment suggested that the recollections which the dramatic critics possess of great actors and actresses of the past are not in the highest degree interesting, but merely that in a dramatic criticism they are out of place.

In a recent production Miss Tallulah Bankhead's acting is described as lacking the this of Bernhardt, the that of Duse and the other thing of Modjeska; and probably various other talents peculiar to Rachel or to Mrs. Siddons are not her's either, but to the inexperienced playgoer, and frequently to the experienced even, such a mere catalogue of great names can mean nothing.

CRITICISM BY CATALOGUE

Each production of a play is a separate and distinct entertainment offered to the public in the hope that it will pay its money to go and see that particular production. What the public has a right to demand from the critics is a statement whether, judged by proper dramatic standards, this actual performance is one which can be recommended as honest value for money or not.

It must be sad for the elderly critic to realise that the *gracieux galans* of his early recollections, *si plaisans en faits et en diets*, are gone with the *neiges d'antan*, but gone they are, and their place is in a book of memoirs, not in a dramatic criticism. Such criticism should surely be a real touchstone of actual dramatic value, not a memorial service, however devout, in the Temple of Thespis.

T. SHORTLAND-JONES

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

HULL PLAYGOERS' SOCIETY

Next autumn, in friendly conjunction with their professional colleagues of the local Repertory Theatre, the 500 members of the "Hull Playgoers' Society" will be extending a cordial welcome to their joint-guests, the delegates to the Annual Conference of the British Drama League.

What exactly the Drama League delegates will see in the stage-production line "when autumn comes" is not, of course, yet settled, but their week-end in the city of Kingston-on-Hull will most certainly include a visit to the model little "Playgoers' Theatre" in the Market-Place which has now for just over a year been the centre of the Playgoers' dramatic activities. Opened on December 6th, 1929, this well-equipped theatre has during its twelve months' existence seen a striking series of productions which have from time to time been recorded in *DRAMA*; the Society is successfully tackling a programme of four full-dress productions each season; this coming month of February will find it giving Shaw's "Man and Superman," followed in April by a further play not yet announced. "Man and Superman" is being produced by Miss Jennie Young, whose admirable acting in past shows has helped to maintain the prestige of the Society, and the stage-settings will, as in previous plays, be designed by Mr. Sydney Thompson.

Of the two plays by the "Hull Playgoers' Society" in their own new theatre during the autumn of 1930, the first (October) was Capek's striking "Robot" drama "R.U.R." The production was done by Mrs. James Downs with her usual skill, and the performance drew crowded houses all the week. It was the first opportunity Hull had had to see "R.U.R.," and its powerful theme mightily gripped the audience, helped as this was by the casting and the acting, which were throughout of a high standard, and by Sydney Thompson's remarkably fine settings. Outstanding characterisations were those of L. Munroe Clark ("Domain"), Wm. S. Blakeney ("Alquist"), and Edgar Appleton ("Radius"), with Liege Kirkby ("Berman") and Deric Harris ("Dr. Gall") giving splendid support. Millicent Jones was admirable as "Helena Glory," and Dorothy Nichol made a radiant "Helena." The Robots were terrifying convincing, and the pace and thrill of the whole production made it quite the Playgoers' best and most finished work of recent years.

Equally striking in a different "genre" was the production, for the week beginning December 1st, of that rarely-seen Shakespeare play "The Winter's Tale."

Here the Playgoers had as producer Mr. E. Haworth Earle, who has a long list of vivid costume-presentations to his credit in the city, and he had never put on a more attractive show. Costumes and music, picturesque stage-grouping and pastoral dances (the last-named arranged by Phyllis Sharrah), all went to make this Shakespearean romance a real delight to ear and eye, more particularly as Hull so seldom sees a Shakespeare production—indeed, as far as the professional theatres go, never.

THE ILKLEY PLAYERS

PRODUCTION OF "THE LILIES OF THE FIELD"

John Hastings Turner's delightful comedy "The Lilies of the Field" was presented by THE ILKLEY PLAYERS on Wednesday and Thursday, December 17th and 18th, in the King's Hall, Ilkley.

In accordance with the policy of the Players, members were cast for this play who had not taken part in the last play, "The Fourth Wall," in April last, and, indeed, only one member of the former cast appeared.

The production was notable for a particularly fine performance by Mr. W. D. Gray as the Rev. John Head, and the excellent characterisation of Mrs. Clifford Chubb as Mrs. Rook-Walter. Miss Joan Suddards made her first appearance on the stage in the part of Catherine, and the sincerity and natural ease with which she played mark her as a discovery of some importance. Miss Margie Prince, who played by arrangement with the Wharfedale Amateurs, was very good as Elizabeth, particularly in her emotional scenes. Miss Phyllis Mammatt as Mrs. Head played a difficult part with distinct success, and polished performances were given by Mrs. H. S. Wood as Lady Roker; Miss Molly Senior-Smith as the Hon. Monica Flane, and Mr. J. R. Phillips as Barnaby Haddon. Miss Phyllis Dunlop as Violet, Mrs. Lloyd Hitt as a maid Mr. Oscar Bigland as Brian Ropes and Mr. R. E. Leach as Withers all appeared on the stage for the first time, and gave performances which promise well for the future of the Players.

The play was produced by Dr. Charles Law, and was a considerable financial success.

The Ilkley Players intend to present their next play in April this year, and they will have to work hard to maintain the high standard which is now expected of them.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

THE OLD GOSPORTIANS' DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

During the past year play readings, instituted for the first time in Gosport, have been successful and well-attended, although the number of those willing to take part is too few.

Plays Read.—"Pygmalion," "Hay Fever," "Poundations," "Abraham Lincoln," and "Jane Clegg."

Play-Goers section formed, chiefly for prior-to-London productions in Southsea, the managers of those theatres giving us every encouragement and in the case of one theatre, special rates.

Production.—Four one-act plays have been produced, including "How he Lied to her Husband," and "Elizabeth Refuses." These were given against black back curtains while the other two were in an interior that was easily converted by various properties into a Sussex kitchen and then into a log cabin. Two points of criticism may be mentioned:

(i) The point of some of the lines (particularly in Shaw) was sometimes lost through lack of emphasis and through the habit of dropping the voice near the end of a speech.

(ii) The rustic atmosphere of "Mrs. Adis" and the rough and ready tone of "Moonshine" were not quite attained, since the actors did not always forget their city culture.

Best Players.—Miss N. A. Davis, Mr. G. H. Fuller, Miss E. Hayward, Miss P. Blackmore, and Mr. C. W. A. Brown.

The show was a complete success financially and worked out exactly on time.

J. H. C. B.

"POMPEY THE GREAT" AT STOCKTON-ON-TEES.

The Stockton Grammar School Dramatic Society produced Masfield's "Pompey the Great" on December 17th and 18th. The part of Pompey was taken by A. R. Taylor, who have a memorable portrayal of the Emperor's nobleness and tenderness. In the Pharsalia scene his acting and declamation, especially in the magnificent speech to the generals, stirred the audience to the most enthusiastic applause. The rest of the cast sustained their parts well.

Trumpet, horn and bugle calls, specially written for the production, were given effectively from the wings. The necessary chanting was accompanied by special music and drum taps: the effect was very impressive.

The staging was simple but very effective. For Pompey's house, the stage was draped with curtains except for double bronze doors at the back. These doors were used by Pompey only and added greatly to the dignity of his entrance and exit.

The play proved very suitable for an all-male cast and its success should encourage the Society to attempt another similar tragedy next year.

THE WILLESSEN PLAYERS.

This society is part of a very definite "movement" which gives to the Willesden wilderness a veritable oasis. In association with the Mansfield House Players there have already been staged this season "St. Joan," "Getting Married," and the Little Plays of St. Francis. Before the season closes the "Green Goddess" will be done in addition to two plays in

the Festival of Community Drama. This notice, however, is of six of the Little Plays of St. Francis performed on January 14th and 17th. Great care had been shown in the choice of these so that they followed on well and, in the aggregate, gave to the figure of St. Francis a representative meaning. From the outset it was apparent that a wise producer had been at work—one who had fully realised that, simple as these plays may read, they can be dull if divorced from their right atmosphere. Robert Mitchell, who not only produced the plays but designed the costumes and took the part of Francis, deserves very special praise. In spite of inequalities in the acting and none too much stage space with which to deal, he gave us beauty and expression. The decorative side was not allowed to detract from the value of the spoken word, and there came over the footlights an air of sincerity that made the evening definitely purposeful. All things considered the Willesden Players in this cycle did work that was in the true spirit of the new amateur theatre, and, with a little more attention to diction, should easily develop into one of London's leading companies.

JOHN BOURNE.

HALTON DEBATING SOCIETY

The work of this society in "Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure" defeats all ordinary standards of criticism since the cast was composed entirely of R.A.F. apprentices whose ages range from sixteen to nineteen. Yet these boys played with fine spirit and, even if some of the witticisms and satire of the piece were lost, the net result to the special audience Halton and Wendover provides, was more than acceptable. Most amateurs would envy the excellent stage arrangements and other conditions under which the society works. The producer saw to it that every advantage was taken of these, and so largely compensated for some necessarily immature acting. Lighting, scenery, and dresses were excellent and, whatever one may think of the suitability of the play for this particular cast, there was evidence of a splendid team spirit and a good deal of clever characterisation. The four somewhat difficult women's parts were surprisingly well taken by the boys. The second act, with its opportunities for vigorous "crowd" work (the R.A.F. was able to swell the usual number of pirates) was very well done and proved that the *metier* of this society is essentially in the realm of the spectacular.

JOHN BOURNE.

"THE DUSTMAN."

AT THE LITTLE THEATRE, LEEDS.

"The Dustman" a fantasy by Marjorie Bain, with incidental music by Norman O'Neill was presented by the Leeds Art Theatre on January 12th for a week.

The authoress, whose first three-act play it was, must be congratulated on a highly original piece of work, full of imagination, containing passages of beautiful poetry, and seasoned with just the right amount of cynicism—a play which must inevitably be heard of again in a wider sphere.

We find the Cinderella of our youthful dreams, an old and quarrelsome lady, wearing a red flannel petticoat, and having bunions—a part played brilliantly by Miss Gladys Ferens, but our feelings are soothed by her son Prince Charmian and his love for the Dustman's daughter, played by Miss Lily Hobson.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

The Dustman, from whom the play takes its name, was a disappointment. Here is a delightful part requiring dignity and a beautiful speaking voice, particularly in the speech explaining his trade in Act 3, but Jack Hope over articulated all the time.

The production, by Mr. A. R. B. Munro, was not flawless, points were missed in Acts 1 and 3, and Act 2 wanted tightening up on cues and pace; but the setting, lighting and costumes in this act were so beautiful; and the music so perfectly suited to the fantastic atmosphere, that these defects were forgiven. Mr. O'Neill conducted himself, on Monday night.

I can recommend this play with confidence to ambitious amateurs, and the Leeds Art Theatre are to be congratulated on a successful production, full houses, and a pioneer spirit; which is what is required in the Dramatic world to-day. E.D.

THE WEST HERTFORDSHIRE PLAYERS.

The West Hertfordshire Players chose "Marigold" for their production in November and it was interesting to notice the advance made by this group during the past year. I had not seen any of their performances since their production of "To Have the Honour" a year ago, when a tendency to drag was very noticeable. In "Marigold" this fault was entirely cured except on a few occasions when certain of the actors were obviously handicapped by the necessity of maintaining an unfamiliar accent. For this reason the play was perhaps not the happiest choice, though the finished and altogether delightful playing of the part of "Mrs. Pringle" perhaps justified it. A little more care might have been taken with the grouping, which at times was very awkward. The extremely small stage was perhaps partly to blame for this, though not entirely, as was proved by the very capable way the dancing of the reel was managed. This was obviously a difficult scene to produce in a restricted space and it was evident that it had been very carefully thought out and rehearsed. Had as much care been taken with the grouping in the earlier scenes the production as a whole would have gone more smoothly. DOROTHY COATES.

THE SALI LOBEL SCHOOL AT MANCHESTER

This school has recently acquired new premises at 260, Oxford Road, Manchester. Dancing, and the interpretation, through physical movement, of musical and dramatic subjects are in these days receiving ever-increasing attention from cultured people. Right back through the centuries—long before any of the other arts could stand alone—dancing was man's expression of moods that were too subtle for any other method of presentation. In our times rhythmical movement at its best, combines the subtlety of old ideas with the enlarged technique of the new ones, and as an art by itself—as in ballets and other established forms—or in the free accompaniment of music and poetry, dancing thus becomes one of the most fascinating means of self-expression.

D'shoara Sali Löbel is a Rumanian artist who has made a special study of these varied aspects of her subjects, and a glance at the prospectus shows the comprehensive nature of her work.

"The Sali Löbel Ballet" and a company that will endeavour to develop interest in chamber drama are special features of a very full scheme. Another notable point is the course of tuition for children. Dancing,

even in its ordinary forms, is no longer a stereotyped thing, and it is good to note that in D'shoara Löbel's method children are taught to use their minds in thinking out for themselves new ideas and movements. The fact that students are encouraged to form parties to visit concerts and picture galleries, as well as theatres, is significant of the earnestness of the training.

GRANVILLE HILL

BRITANNIC HOUSE PLAYERS

The Britannic House Players make it a rule to produce only plays of genuine dramatic value, at the same time generally avoiding recent West End successes. They do not hesitate to experiment, and they definitely treat box office receipts as a secondary consideration. Some of their more noteworthy ventures have been Shaw's "The Man of Destiny," C. B. Fernald's translation of "The Mask and the Face," "The Angel in the House" by Eden Philpotts and Basil Macdonald Hastings, and Sheridan's "The Rivals." Mr. T. C. Harrowing has acted as their producer for the past few years and he deserves congratulations on the high standard of their recent productions.

AT BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY

Enthusiasm for the work of the British Drama League was demonstrated by a large audience at the Birmingham University, Edgbaston, recently, when Miss Jane Ellis attended to adjudicate upon three original one-act plays, and an address was given by Mr. L. Broughton Chatwin.

Two of the productions "Cromwell Dreams," and "Synthetic Husbands" are by Walter Roberts, a medical student, and were performed by members of the University Dramatic Society. One is tensely dramatic and the other is a fantastic comedy, laid in the show-room of a London emporium. Both were well acted and cleverly produced.

The third offering was a romantic comedy, "Aren't Bachelors Wonderful?" written and produced by Ann Porter and performed by the Society of One-Act Players.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

8th January, 1931.

Dear Sir,

I have read with very much interest the letter from the Dramatic Adviser of the Boy Scouts' Association, contained in your issue for January, and I should like to take this opportunity to say how very much I endorse his views.

Much as we should like assistance in the matter of the loan of costumes, properties, scenery, etc., I feel this is asking a tremendous lot, but the other point mentioned, viz., the voluntary assistance of producers, is one which would be enormously appreciated by our many affiliated clubs.

No doubt you will know that at a Conference arranged by the Junior Drama Committee some time ago, our representative stressed this particular point, as did those representing the girls' clubs and other similar organisations, and I felt I could not let this opportunity pass to draw once again the attention of the British Drama League to this very pressing need.

Yours faithfully,

CHARLES A. WRENCH,
London Federation of Boys Clubs,
222, Blackfriars Road,
Southwark, S.E.1.

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12th, 13th, 14th —

"BEAUTY AND THE BARGE"

W. W. Jacobs and Louis N. Parker

19th, 20th, 21st —

"ELECTRA" - - - Euripides (Gilbert Murray)

26th, 27th, 28th —

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Any organised society or group of not less than ten persons may become affiliated to the Drama League, and as an affiliated body shall acquire and exercise all the privileges afforded by the League, including free receipt of "Drama" monthly and the use of the League's Library. The minimum affiliation fee is £1 1s.

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8 ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON, W.C.2

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